

3 THE  
*Christian Conventicle*

OR,

The Private-Meetings of  
*God's People* in evil times,  
vindicated, and warranted  
by the Word of God.

Being some-time since deli-  
vered in several Sermons,

And now published for  
publick benefit,

---

*Not forsaking the Assembling of our  
selves together, as the manner of some  
is, but exhorting one another, &c.  
Heb. 10. 25.*

---

Printed in the year 1671.



T H E  
*Christian Conventicle, &c.*

Malach. 3. 16, 17.

*Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a Book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his Name: And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my Jewels, &c.*

**T**His Prophecy of *Malachi* may fitly be stiled, *A holy Dialogue*; wherein many are brought in to speak their minds.

First, you have here the *Prophet*;

Secondly, the *Messias*;

Thirdly, *Wicked and Prophane men*;

Fourthly, the *pious and holy persons*;

And, lastly, *God himself*.

The *Prophet*, he speaks *thunderingly*;

Christ, he speaks *threatningly*;

The *Prophane*, they speak *blasphemingly*;

God's People, they speak *frequently*; And

God himself, he speaks *most comfortably*.

1. For the first: The *Prophet*, he speaks *thunderingly*; he lets fly thunderbolts of wrath both against the Priests, and against the People of that Age: Their sins were very *many*, and very *great* both, as their *Sacrilege*, their *mixtures* in the Worship of God, their *marrying* to the daughters of a strange god; and many such things, as may be read in the first and second chapters. But *that* that did aggravate their sin, was, that this was done presently after their deliverance out of a seventy years captivity. And this is that which is very much displeasing unto God, that he should lose all his *labour* and *love* in afflicting of a people, and that after restoring of them to their former priviledges, they should make such evil returns unto the Lord God.

2. The *Messias*, he speaks, and he speaks very *abreatheningly*. The *Jews* they had a flattering conceit, that when Christ came, there should be nothing but honey, and oyl, and fatness, *i. e.* all manner of pleasure; they had a foolish false conceit, that Christ should come as another *Alexander*, in great glory and pomp, conquering all before him: But our *Messias* tells them here, that he would come in another way, they should find him to come in a way of *purity* and *holiness*; it's to *purifie the sons of Levi*: he would be as the *Refiner's fire*, and the *Fullers sope*; He sends his *Herald of Arms* before him, to proclaim *War*.

3. *Profane men*, they speak; and they speak  
blasphemy.



blasphemously, as you may see in chap. 2. last vers. and in chap. 3. 13. These *Wipers* they spit their venom in the very face of Almighty God; wherein have we wearied him? when ye say, Every one that doth evil, is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them, or, where is the God of Judgement? (Oh, my Brethren, that ever the just and righteous God should be so much scandal'd and blasphemed, that he should delight in sinners!) And then he goes on, — And, your words have been stout against me, — Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his Ordinance, and walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? We count the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up, and they that tempt God are delivered, And then,

4. You have the People of God, they speak; and they speak frequently; Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another. What it was that was spoken by them one to another? It is thought they spake contrary to what the wicked did; they blessed God, when others blasphemed him; and spake for him, when they spake against him. And then,

5. God, he speaks; and he speaks comfortably to them; — They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I make up my Jewels, and I will spare them, as a man spareth his children that are near and dear unto him.

Thus have I (as briefly as I could) brought

you unto the Text. And you may see what my Text (at the very first view of it) seems to be ; (I shall make some use of it, and (I hope) to some purpose;) My Text is nothing else but *An Holy Conventicle*, (For, how could they *speak often one to another*, if they did not *often meet together*?) and you have the *probation* and *approbation* of it ;

1. The *probation* of it, from the practice of God's People. And

2. The *approbation*, from the speech of God himself.

1. The *probation*. They don't assemble themselves together (as the prophane rabble of the world would make it) for *evil practices*, and for *evil purposes*. And

2. It cannot be *so bad* ; nay, it must be *singularly good* for them so to meet together, or else it would not have that promise made of God unto it, as you see in the words.

In the Text,

1. You have Christians *regarded*, And

2. *Recorded* (for the credit of them) for their meeting together.

1. *Regarded*. The Text sayes, The Lord *bearkened and heard*. 'Tis a word that implies a *diligent attention* unto any thing ; and (as one observes well upon the place) there is the *attention* of the ear, and the *intention* of the mind. And then,

'Tis *recorded*. That whatever they spake, all their

their speeches, prayers, &c. they were entered in-  
to God's Book of Remembrance. As God has his  
bottle, so he has his book; as he is present in the  
Assembly, to bottle up their tears; so he is there  
with his Book, to write down all their perfor-  
mances. God has but two books, the book of his  
Documents, and the book of his Monuments: now  
if we learn & live according to the book of Gods  
documents, we shall be sure to be recorded in, and  
rewarded according to God's Book of Monuments,  
where he hath written down the carriages of his  
Saints and People.

But now, for the matter of the Text it self:  
you may be pleased to observe these particulars;

1. The Persons, who;
2. The Act, what;
3. The Time, when;
4. The Manner, how;
5. The Subjects, with whom they were thus  
meeting.

1. The Persons, who. Who? They are they  
that fear the Lord.

2. The Act, what they are about. Some may  
think, sure they are about some vain foolish thing  
or other. No, they are talking and discoursing  
of God, and of holy things. And then,

3. The time, when. When wicked and un-  
godly men were blaspheming God, when they were  
feasting, and in the midst of their jovialty, then  
these were keeping a Conventicle. And then,

4. The manner, how. Some may say, They will be quickly weary of thus spending time together ; they may do it *once* it may be. No, but they do it *often*. — They *spake often one to another*. And then

5. The Subjects, with whom they did it ; and that with those of their *own party*, *opinion*, and *persuasion*, those that were *fellow-jewels* with themselves, those whose names were written in the *Book of Life*.

Thus have I given you the *division* of the Text. The *Observations* are these ;

1. *Obser.* That let the *Times* be never so *bad*, and never so *prophane*, yet the Lord has a certain number of people that are *good* at that time. Though the Devil has *most*, yet God ever has the *best* ; he will take the choice unto himself : *Then they that feared the Lord, &c.*

2. *Obser.* That when wicked men are the *worst*, then God's People are the *best* ; — *Then they that feared the Lord*, they stood up, and there was a holy courage within them : It was *winter* with the wicked, and therefore it was *fire* with the righteous, they burnt the hotter.

3. *Obser.* That the fear of God is a singular Antidote against *Atheism* and *Apostacy*. — *They that feared the Lord*, then they stood up.

4. *Obser.* That *holy Conference*, 'tis a most necessary duty in *unholy times*. As here you see, the Times the Prophet complains of most bitterly,

ly, how full of vileness and wickedness they were; Now the People of God, they met often one with another, conferred and discoursed often one with another.

Brethren, you see here are four very sweet and sovereign Doctrines; they are all so singular, that ( I confess ) I can't tell which of the four to chuse, and to make the subject of my discourse.

Here is that that is matter of *comfort*, of *credit*, of *safety*, and of *duty* unto you; As

1. That the times are never so *bad*, but that God has some that are *good* in those times, ( seven thousand in the Prophet *Elijah's* time, though he did not know it; so, there may be many now that we do not know of. ) That's matter of *comfort*.

2. That the *worse* others are, the *better* will God's People be. Brethren, this is matter of *credit* and *commendation* to God's People, that they will not be made the *worse*, but are made the *better* by *bad* times.

3. That the fear of God is a *preservative* against the infection of *Atheism* and *Apostacy*: This is matter of *safety* and *security*. We see *Cedars* blown up by the root, but so long as we have the fear of God in us, we shall never be blown up.

4. These are the most unholy times ( I am persuaded ) that ever *England* saw: Now, Brethren, for us to meet together, and confer together, and pray

pray together, is but a performance of that duty that is required of us. And this I could chuse very well, to make the subject of my discourse :

But, as *Samuel*, when many were brought before him, *1 Sam. 16*. This I could think the Lord's Anointed, and another, and another ; but it was a *David*, a little younger son that the Lord had chose : O so (me-thinks) I could think of these four Doctrines ; yet there is a little Doctrine, a little *David* yet behind (methinks) that I would desire to spend a little discourse on at this time, and that is,

*Doct. That the Fearers of God are, and ought to be frequenters of Conventicles.*

I chose this subject upon this double account,  
1. Because nothing is more derided by wicked men than these are ; and truly, nothing more slighted (for the most part) by the Godly themselves than these are. Now to raise the honour of Conventicles against the contempt of wicked men, and the value of them against the contempt of godly men, I thought good to say something of it, to declare the excellency of it.

2. I chose it, because that in this Doctrine is contained the extract of all the other Doctrines. For,

1. If I can make this good to you, (as I hope I shall) here you shall be sure to meet with such

as

as are good in bad times: and there you meet with the first Doctrine.

2. By frequenting of Conventicles, you will be made the better by the prayers and exhortations of God's faithful Ministers, and those that fear the Lord. And this will make the second Doctrine, That the worse others are, the better they be.

3. By frequenting of Conventicles, you will attain to the more fear of the Lord, and so attain to more safety; And there you meet with the third Doctrine.

4. By frequenting of Conventicles, you will perform Duty; And that's the summe of the last Doctrine.

Now, in the prosecution of this point, I shall a little make bold,

1. To explain this Doctrine.

2. To confirm it.

And so to make application of it.

For the first. For the *explication*. There is but two things to be explained,

1. What's meant by a *Conventicle*?

2. What by the *Fearers of God*?

First, for a *Conventicle*: 'tis nothing else but a meeting together of men and women in one place. That's the proper meaning of that word, *Conventicle*. And then

You must know, there are two sorts of *Conventicles*; such as are the greater, and such as are the lesser *Conventicles*: the great ones in the Church,



*Churches*, and the lesser ones in *Chambers*, or in *private Houses*, and no more difference, but with respect to the *degrees* of them; and more or less does not any way vary the *kind*. And if there be any such that deride private Meetings in *Chambers* as *Conventicles*, they do throw dirt into the *Congregation of God*. And

Again; There is a twofold *Conventicle*, a *bad*, and a *good*.

1. A *bad*: A Convention or meeting together of ungodly men, for *wicked ends*, and to accomplish wicked designs. [And indeed, they are only these which may properly be called *Conventicles*.] This (in Scripture) hath many names given unto it; It is called the *Convention of Deriders*: 'tis called the *Council of Scorners*, Psal. 1. 1. 'tis called the *Congregation of Hypocrites*, &c, Job 15. 34.

Now, for the matter of *their ends*, why they *convent* themselves, they are ordinarily these six;

1. They meet to offer up worship to *Idols*, 1 Kin. 18. 20, & 26.

2. They meet to *defile themselves and bodies*, 1 Tim. 1. 10.

3. They meet to *abuse the creatures*; to run on in excess of riot, 1 Pet. 4. 4.

4. They meet to *slander*, to *censure*, and to *scandalize the People of God*. Psal. 41. 5, 6, 7, 8.

5. They meet to lay their design for the *ruine and destruction, and extirpation of the Churches and People*.



People of God, Prov. 30. 14. Act. 22: 22. And  
6. They meet to *disturb the peace of the Place  
and Nation where they are.* Psal. 140. 2.

These are such as (in *their sense*) they call  
*Conventicles.* And I know none more guilty  
than *they* that frequent *Play-houses, Whore-houses,  
Alehouses and Taverns,* where wicked men come  
to make their *Songs* against the People of God.  
And these (in Scripture-sense) may more fitly be  
called *Confederacies* than *Conventicles.* For my  
part, I think such places worthy to be punished  
by the Judges.

Secondly, (Brethren) There is a *good* and a  
*holy Conventicle*; That is, when God's People  
meet together for *holy ends*, to perform *holy acti-  
ons.* And this (my Brethren) is called the *Con-  
gregation of the Righteous,* Psal. 1. 5. the *Assem-  
bly of the Saints,* Psal. 89. 5. the *meeting together  
of the upright ones,* Psal. 111. 1. And many such  
names are given to it in Scripture.

And the *ends* that they meet for, they are *very  
many*, and as *good as many*; (And when I speak of  
this *Conventicle*, I mean nothing but the *Communi-  
on of Saints.*)

That God's People meet together in private  
in evil times; —

1. 'Tis not in contempt of the *Publick Assem-  
blies.* The Lord (that knows our hearts) knows,  
that while we had *Publick Assemblies,* and the  
*Ordinances in purity,* without the mixture of dis-  
tasteful

tasteful things, we did prize Publick Ordinances, and did highly esteem them; and the loss of them is our grief, and the ground of our mourning. 'Tis not therefore out of contempt that we meet in private; for when we are together there, we do mourn for our losses, and pray for the freedom of Publick Ordinances again. Much less——

( 2. ) is the ground of our meeting in private for *lewd practices*, as the wicked are apt to charge us. The *Heathens* were wont to charge the *Primitive Christians*, That they met in the evening, and put out their Candles, and then they were guilty of all manner of lewdness. They muse as they use; They themselves are wicked in private, and they think others so: But now God's People, they mourn for the wickedness of the wicked; they detest the lewd practices of the wicked, and therefore are far from being guilty themselves. Nor,

3. Do God's People convent together to move *Sedition*, ( That's another thing that's charged upon them. ) No, Religion teacheth us better, to pray for *Kings*, and those in *Authority*. And God, and the Places where we meet, can bear witness, that we make it our work to call on God for mercy for our King, and for our Governors. But——

When the People of God meet together in private, 'tis

1. To confer one with another. This is plain

in the Text ; — *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one with another.*

2. Another end why they meet together, it is to pray with one another, to *pour out their souls* into the bosom of God, to call and cry to God for mercy for the *Nations*, and mercy for their *own Souls*, and mercy for their *Friends*, and to supplicate God's return to them again.

3. A third end is, to *observe the Gifts and Graces* one of another.

4. To *break Bread* one with another.

5. To *humble our souls* exceedingly, for the *sins and calamities of the Age and Time wherein we live* ; to humble our selves for those sins that have provoked God to deprive us of *Publick-Meetings*. Such as fear the Lord, O they mourn for the sins of their *nature* in private Meetings, and for the sins of their *lives* ; for their *omissions and commissions* ; for their sins of *prosperity*, for *wantonness* under means and mercies ; for the sins of *Professors*, ( for their *formality* and *lukewarmness* ) that have laid stumbling-blocks before the weak ; and they mourn for the enmity and debauchery of the Wicked *now*, and for all those dishonours that are done to God.

6. Another end of their meeting, is, to *exhort* one another.

7. To *warn* one another.

8. To *edify* one another. The People of God they find themselves *weak, dull, sad*, therefore they

they go into the *communion of Saints* in private places, that they may be *strengthened, quickened, and comforted* by conference, and by the discharge of their duties.

9. The People of God meet thus together, that they may *meet with Christ*, that they may have his sweet presence, and may be instructed of him, that they may have *Christ's Spirit*, and the *graces and comforts* of Christ. *Act. 2. 1, 2, 3, 4.*

10. They thus meet to *advance the Name of God, and of Christ*. That's rendred as the reason of their meeting here in the Text; When they were met together, the Text sayes, *they thought on his Name*; every one was proposing what they should do to promote the Honour of God, what course they should take to advance the Interest of Jesus Christ, how to further the Salvation of Souls.

11. When you are met together, you must be sure to *praise the Lord*; As you ought to begin with prayer, so you should end with praise; God must never lose the praise that is due unto his Name.

12. You ought to meet together to *excommunicate* wicked men, to curse them in the Name of God, (*i. e.*) such as are impenitent, and nothing will serve their turns but to reproach Gods People. Thus much for the explication of the first thing, (*viz.*) a *Conventicle*, what it is.

Secondly.

Secondly. The *Fearers of God*, What's meant by that? (This is as large to explain as the other.)

1. You must look upon the *fear of God* with reverence to the *Object* of Fear, and the *Author* of Fear: The *Object* of Fear, so God is; the *Author* of Fear, so God must be. Take it thus. We must look unto God as the *Object* of Fear, and we must look unto God (as he is the *Author* of Fear) to make us the *Subjects* of Fear. And these two, they end in that same fear which is called a *fear to offend*.

2. There is a *servile Fear*, a *slavish Fear*, and a *filial Fear*, a *Religious Fear*. Some fear God because he is a *just* God, and an *avenger*, more than for his *goodness*: but the other is a *filial* fear, whereby a gracious soul fears to offend God because he is good and gracious.

3. This *Fear* is taken two wayes, (1.) for the *Worship* of God; (2.) for our *walking* with God; our *worshipping* God aright, and for our *walking* with God aright.

These two *Fears* are like two great *Poles*, on which the body of our *Spiritual-Life* doth move and turn.

And this fear of God it wil *over-aw* our hearts; it will keep us from sinning; it will cast out the fear of men; it will quicken to duty; it will draw out love; it will make you willing to lay down your life for *him*, who so readily laid down his life for you.

Thus I have done with the first Particular, the explaining of the Text.

Secondly. For the proving on't, (though there be no great need, yet) take two or three Texts;

In *Jer.* 23. 25. 'tis said, That the people shall meet together, and enquire one of another, *What hath the Lord answered? what hath the Lord spoken?* They should come together and enquire what the Lord had delivered to the Prophet.

So, in *1 Thess.* 5. 11, 14. *Comfort your selves together, and edifie one another, even as also ye do. And, We exhort you, Brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient towards all men.*

And, in *Heb.* 10. 23, 24, 25. (speaking there that we should continue constant in the profession of our Faith, saith he) *Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love, and to good-works, [not forsaking the assembling of our selves together,] as the manner of some is.* No, God's People must not forsake the Conventicles.

One Text more, (and that's very full to this purpose;) in *John* 13. 34, 35. There you shall find that our Saviour was telling his Disciples, that *he was going away from them*; and, thinking that that would take away much of their comfort, saith he, *A new Commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another.* The meaning of the Text is this, (as some render it) *'Tis true, you will have a great loss by my absence, but you may make it up by the*

the presence one of another : Frequent communion one with another, help one another, and thus make up the loss, this will make up your comfort.

For matter of presidents, the Scripture is full.

When the Disciples (for fear of the Jews) were met together in a holy Conventicle, Christ came and stood in the midst of them, and parted his mind to them freely and fully, 20. 19 & 26 verses.

And the Apostles themselves spent their time in little else than in meeting together ; we read of their being met all together in one place with accord, Act. 2. 1. of their going into an upper room and continuing there with one accord in prayer and supplication, Act. 1. 13, 14. and again, of their being assembled with one accord, Act. 15. 25.

And it was their common course in the primitive times thus to meet together ; As saith Tertullian in his Apologie ; saith he, We all meet together in a Conventicle, and we knock at Heaven's doors with our prayers, and we will not let God alone till he be pleased to come down graciously unto us. Know thus much, that all places are now sanctified for our assembling. I confess, 'tis best publick ; Truth needs not to seek corners. But in every place Incense shall be offered up unto thy Name, Mal. 1. 11. And, -- I will -- that men pray everywhere, lifting up pure hands, 1 Tim. 2. 8.

But now, what's the ground or reason that the



Id be such a care amongst God's People, that should thus frequent the Communion of Saints? answer, —

Because there are *many duties* that are en-  
 ded God's People to perform, that if they  
 t conventicle, they can never perform; as,  
 ding up one another in their most holy Faith,  
 20. and their strengthening and watching over  
 another, &c. How can these duties be done  
 they don't meet together, and assemble them-  
 es together, to strengthen, encourage, ex-  
 , reprove one another?

e. Another reason is, That God hath given  
 iety of Gifts, of Abilities and Graces unto his  
 ple, that they should *communicate* them one  
 another. That God has given *light* unto the  
 is that it should *distribute* its beams to  
 Earth for the good of its Inhabitants. That  
 d hath given *water* unto the Sea, it is, that it  
 ould send forth of its abundance in Rivers and  
 eams, that it may come to be serviceable un-  
 the use of man. And so truly, that God hath  
 de the light of the *Sun of Righteousness* to arise  
 the hearts of any of his People, and the beams  
 his Graces and Gifts to be in them, 'tis that  
 ey should *disperse* them, and *communicate* them  
 the use and service one of another. As in  
 Cor. 10. 7. *The manifestation of the Spirit is gi-*  
*ven to every man to profit withal.* And, in Luke  
 , from ver. 13, to ver. 26. Christ (there) gave  
 variety



variety of Talents, Why ? For *Improvement*. There is no *Gift, Grace, or Ability* that God given to any one that is a member of his Church but he ought to be serviceable and instrument with the same for the good of others. 'Tis enough for Merchants to have an *Estate*, but they must have a *trading*, they must go to the *change*. So it is with Christians ; 'tis not enough for them that they have *gifts and graces*, but they must *meet* together in some place ; that is the *Exchange*, where they do *sell* such and such things to others, and *buy* such and such things of them again ; I mean in a Gospel-sense ; ( viz. imparting Counsels and Admonitions to others and receiving Exhortations & Counsels of others ) Some have the gift of *resolving Cases of Conscience* ; others have a special gift to *pour out the souls in Prayer* : Some (again) God has given great abilities to in the *imparting of Experiences* ; so to *comfort and heal wounded Spirits*, and such like. Now, every one of these must be *improved and employed* ; And how could this possibly thus be if it were not that they had *meetings together* ? But then——

3. Another reason is, Because that in the Meetings, they are sure to meet with the Lord Jesus Christ. O my Brethren, whither would not a gracious heart go, if he were sure to meet with Christ there ? Why, if thou comest thither to the *god* thou oughtest to come, ( i. e. to the

in Christ) he will be sure to meet with thee  
 e. — *Where two or three are met together in my  
 name, there am I in the midst of them.* He will  
 purchase his spiritual and blessed presence, and  
 will be giving out of his graces, and making  
 greater discoveries of *himself* and of his *love* to  
 them that come there to that end, to *meet with*  
 e. Whence should we come to have those  
 refreshings of soul after Jesus Christ? comes it  
 from the Ministers words? No, but from Christs  
 Spirit. O therefore (Brethren) I beseech you,  
 not seeing Christ *promiseth his presence in such a*  
*place*, do not withdraw your selves from the  
 place. Again,

4. Another reason is, Because in *these Meet-*  
*ings* we are sure to meet with *pure Ordinances,*  
*with holy and heavenly Administrations and In-*  
*stitutions*; we shall have God's Worship in a  
 Gospel-mould, without humane Inventions or  
 Mens Traditions. In the *publick* (many times)  
 the *Elephants hoof* has been too deep in those wa-  
 ters, so that there is a great deal of need of the  
*unicorns horn*: but here is nothing but what comes  
 from an upright heart, guided and ordered accor-  
 ding to the *Rule*. And as God has set us apart  
 to his Worship, so we should *uphold* his Worship.  
*where the Carcase is, there the Eagles are gathered*  
*together*; And (not where the *shew* of an *Ordi-*  
*nance* is, but) where the true Ordinance of the  
 Lord Jesus Christ is, there the Eagles are upon  
 their wings. Again,

5. Ano-

5. Another reason is, Because this is an Article of our Faith ; *We believe the Communion of Saints*. Now, my Brethren, *we believing it in our principle*, it would be sad if *we should deny it in our practice*. It is strange to me, that men should be so zealous to *stand up at the Creed*, and not *stand up to the Creed*, to keep all the Article there repeated. For a man to *hold the Communion of Saints*, and to *oppose the Communion of Saints* 'tis somewhat strange : I shall not give much for this man's faith. Those men that *bate and deride the Communion of Saints*, I can't believe that they *believe any such thing as the Communion of Saints* let their *Creed* be what it will. I fear there are too many that have no better account to give of their *belief*, but that *it must be so*. Again,

6. The People of God must be frequenters of Conventicles, because of the *great good* that may be *done and received* by these Christian Meetings. My Brethren, *true communion*, 'tis nothing else but the *communication* of our *spiritual strength*, of our *graces* and of our *comforts* unto one another. *Here ( my Brethren ) the tongue of the Wise is a choice Silver, and the lips of the Righteous feed many*. Many times there are those that have got so much comfort, strength, building up in faith and resolution at such a Meeting, that they have had cause to bless God for it for ever. Many times a Merchant gets more money in *one hour on the Exchange*, than in a *whole day in his own Warehouse* :

o, many times God's People get more in one hour at the *Exchange*, at the place of the meeting of God's People, than at home in a whole day.

7. For the People of God thus to meet together, it is one way of owning and honouring of Christ. That when good things are frequently left off, we should be found in the practice of them, such as Psalms are, and the like, thus we honour our Lord Jesus.

8. Thus to assemble our selves, and perform our duty to the Most-High, does much hinder the prevalency of corruption. If we should leave off assembling our selves, corruption would get head; you can't omit a duty but your sin will be encouraged by it. *Thomas* was absent from that holy Conventicle, *John* 20. 24, 25. and his unbelief got head; *I will not believe* (sayes he) *till I see his wounds*. Omit Prayer in a morning, and *Passion* will get head that morning. Therefore the People of God should thus meet together, to prevent the growth of their corruptions.

Now, all this laid together, I hope you will give me leave to conclude, *That it is a very necessary duty, for God's People to meet often one with another.*

Now for the Application of this point.

Let it be,

First, A *Use of Information*. If it be thus, (Brethren) that the Fearers of God are and ought to be frequenters of Conventicles, the Old-Testament-

stament-Believers were so, and the New-Testament-Believers were so, as you have heard; Then

1. It does inform us what we should think of those men that hate, abhor, deride, detect, oppose, make Laws against, and persecute the Assemblies of God's People: What to think of them? why that they are ignorant of that very Religion that they profess; to think of them as enemies of goodness, as limbs of Satan, and Factors for Hell; yea, worse than very Heathens and Infidels themselves. *Nero*, and other Roman Magistrates, will one day rise up against that Generation that do oppose, oppress, depress the Meetings of Gods People; for *they permitted Paul to dwell in his own hired house, and let such as would come unto him, and* (saith the Text) *no man hindered him, Act. 28. 30, 31.* Nay, the *Grand-Turk* (that great enemy of Christianity) will rise up against this Generation; for, pay him but *Toll and Tribute*, and he will let you enjoy your *Liberty in Religion*.

2. What does it inform us of them that will needs be accounted Professors of Christianity, and very good Christians would be thought to be, yet will be so shy as to shun all these Meetings, they will not come nigh them? Why, that they have too much of the fear of men, and too little of the fear of God: *that's* the reason they will not come thither. It was a very great blemish in *Nichodmus's* Coat of Arms, that he would not  
come

come to our *Saviour's Conventicle* but by night; (*Job. 3. 2.*) when none should take notice of him: and 'tis a greater dishonour to them that will never come at all, neither in the day, nor at night neither. Even as it was with *Nichodemus* and others of the Jews, *they were afraid they should be thrust out of the Synagogue*: So (I have cause to think) many of these are afraid of *Communica-tion*, and all because they are afraid of *Excommu-nication*.

*Object.* I know what some will plead for them-selves, to take off all such kind of censures as these, *viz.* That there are *Publick Meetings and Assemblies*—.

*Answ.* Take heed of touching any such Pitch, lest you should be defiled with the same. Take this for a Rule, *That Worship which we ought to perform to the Most-High, and be found in the practice of, ought to be both for the matter and man-ner thereof, according to the prescribed Rule of Gods Word only, no men on Earth having authority to de-vise according to their own fancies and imaginati-ons, any forms of God's Worship and Service.* Any Worship which is not bottom'd and grounded upon the Word of God, is a *false Worship*, and such as we may not lawfully be present at, unless some way or other we do shew our dislike, or de-clare our dissent.

I shall now give you (1.) some discoveries of a false Worship, and then (2.) prove to you the un-

blawf  
Worsh  
wn, o  
First  
orship  
1. W  
f is ta  
tice o  
Thus, i  
Ahab  
aal K  
nd wo  
will pr  
might  
gerous  
to mar  
When  
with  
comm  
you kn  
when  
Arume  
ship.  
this w  
when  
his Ho  
for his  
and go  
taken  
been a

lawfulness of being present at such a way of Worship, when by our presence we do seem to own, or to countenance, or to approve of it.

First, To give you some discoveries of a false worship.

1. When it's such a worship, the patern whereof is taken from Idolaters, and not from the practice of the holy *Prophets* and *Apostles* of God. Thus, if you observe that place in *1 King. 16. 31.* *Ahab taking to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal King of the Zidonians, went and served Baal, and worshipped him.* Ahab marrying Jezebel, he will presently be of his wife's Religion. And we might note this by the way, *That it's a very dangerous thing for those that are of the true Religion, to marry with those that are of a false Religion.* When the children of *Israel* began to fall in love with the daughters of *Moab*, they soon fell to commit Idolatry with them. *Solomon's Wives* you know how they drew him to Idolatry. Wives when they are naught, are oftentimes great Instruments to draw their husbands unto false worship. So that hence they took their pattern for this worship of *Baal*, from the Idolaters. Yea, when God had prescribed *Moses* the pattern of his House, how he ought to frame the *Tabernacle* for his Worship; if *Moses* should have left that, and gone to the Nations round about him, and taken patterns from them, would not this have been a great abomination in the sight of God? Why



Why, should we lay by the *Rule* of the *Word*, and the practice of the *Churches* in the dayes of the *Apostles* recorded in the *Scriptures*, and go unto *Turkie*, to take our pattern of *Worship* from the *Pagans*, or go unto *Rome*, and borrow our *forms*, and *rites*, and *modes* of *Worship* from the *Papists*; would not this be to present an unclean thing unto the Lord, who hath so strictly commanded his People, that they should not so much as enquire after other Nations, how they worship their Gods, nor imitate them in any of their actions? *Dent.* 12. 30, 31, 32. Why should *Light* go to borrow of *Darkness*? shall the Church of *Christ* take their pattern of *Worship* from *Antichrist*? can there any pure *Water* (fit for the service of the *Sanctuary* and the *City* of our God) flow out of the *Romish* puddle? or, can a man pick any *Gold* (for the adorning of the *Temple* of *Christ*) out of the *Popes dunghil*, where there is nothing but *mire* and *filth*? Though you should take a *Spaniard*, or a *French-man*, and put an *English coat* upon him, yet this does not make him an *English-man*: So, if there be one thing in the way of *Worship* that was not prescribed nor practised in the dayes of *Christ*, or in the dayes of the *Apostles* recorded in *Scripture*, it is born out of due time, and is the innovation and invention of *Antichrist*, and it is certainly a false worship.

2. Such a worship as has been cast out by the People of God in reforming times, and afterwards in

in corrupt  
ainly)  
same w  
ing of.  
before  
the chil  
Lord, a  
God of  
Land o  
afterw  
raised  
of Baal  
Israel.  
ing the  
ning a  
ments  
unto  
you sh  
upon  
down  
and b  
Cove  
his W  
(by m  
who  
and w  
to fal  
thing  
mand  
when



in corrupt times is brought in again, this is (certainly) a false worship. So it was here in this same worship of *Baal* which we have been speaking of. You shall find it was in *Israel* many years before *Ahab*, for (in *Judg. 2. 11.*) 'tis said, That the children of *Israel* did evil in the sight of the Lord; and served *Baalim*; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the Land of *Egypt*, and followed other gods, &c. And afterwards (in *chap. 6.*) you find how that they raised up some other forms, pull down the Altars of *Baal*, and abolish all the worship of *Baal* in *Israel*. And indeed, you may observe concerning the people of *Israel*, that when (for their running, a whoring after false worship) the judgments of God were upon them; Then they cried unto the Lord, and God delivered them. And you shall then often find a very zealous spirit upon them against false Worship; then they pul down the Altars of *Baal*, & cut down the Groves, and break in pieces the Idols, and enter into a Covenant with God, that they will keep close to his Worship: but after a few years are over again, (by means of some evil Princes or Governours, who did discountenance the true wayes of God, and were favourers of Idolatry) the people fell to false worship again, and did build again the things that they had destroyed. Now, God commands his People to come out of *Babylon*; now, when they have come out (in any degree or measure)

sure) by casting off *corruptions in worship*, the Lord likes not that they should go back again, that they should return to those corruptions from whence they had before departed.

3. When 'tis such a way of worship as is matter of *great offence*, and a *burden* to the Godly in a Nation. So it was here too in this worship of *Baal*; though the *most* and *worst* of the people of the Jews fell *in* with it, yet there were thousands in *Israel* (which *feared the Lord*) that were greatly offended with it, and cryed out against it, and withdrew from it. Surely it's one sign *that Worship is not of God*, when the most holy and gracious and *strict-living* people in a Nation are greatly offended with it, and cannot submit unto it; and when 'tis the wicked and ungodly rout in a Nation that do so exceedingly desire it, and take their rest in it. Why, that a way of Worship is so well lik'd of by the superstitious and ungodly people in a Nation, is argument enough how much it is disliked of by God. In *Exod. 8. 26.* when *Pharaoh* would have had *Moses* to have sacrificed in the Land, ( — *Sacrifice to God in the Land.* ) Sayes *Moses*, 'Tis not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abominations of the Egyptians to the Lord our God: *No, shall we sacrifice the Abominations of the Egyptians before their eyes, and shall they not stone us? will they not stone us?* Mark, The pure and sincere Worship of God, that would have been an Abomination to the *Egyptians*,

*tians,*

tians, they would not have endured it, but would have slain upon them and stoned them. Ah! my Brethren, the pure Ordinances of God, are hated by the carnal world, they don't like of them. I but when a way of worship is so well liked, and approved of by those that are the worst, and the most prophane in a Nation, that may be argument enough to prove that 'tis not of God; for, if it were God's Worship, they would not love it nor delight in it. So then, I say, when the multitude of those that are the most vicious, ungracious and unholy, those that are the gross, loose, superstitious and wicked in a Nation, are the people that do like and love it, surely this is another sign *that Worship is not of God.*

4. And lastly. When 'tis such a way of Worship as people are forced into by *violence and compulsion*, whether they like or approve of it or no. Thus it was also with this Worship of *Baal*; it was as much as their lives were worth not to submit to it. Those that would not bow down to the golden Image, they must be thrown into the fiery Furnace, *Dan. 3. 6.* And 'tis the known mark of the *Beast* and his false worshippers, *Rev. 13. 16.* that *he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right-hand, or in their foreheads; and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark.* That is, those that would not by some act or other, by some kind of testimony or other, testify their  
con-

conformity unto his worship, they must be imprisoned, they must be banished. The worship of Antichrist, 'tis an *Iron yoke*, it will *break* those that will not *bow* unto it. If men will not believe their Doctrines, and subscribe their Articles, and submit unto their Worship, what then? Why then they must be fined, then imprisoned, then banished. Why now, certainly, this is not the way of Christ, that men should be *whipped* and *soured*, and *driven* into the profession of his Religion, and the practice of his Worship; that they should be forced into it by fire and faggot, strappado's and gallows's: No, the way of Christ is, to *teach* people, and to *instruct* them; to *persuade* *Japhet* to dwell in the tents of *Shem*: he would not have his Religion forced on any one; that people (by Fines, Imprisonments and Banishments) should be forced into the acknowledgement of him; He would have men *drawn* to him, and not *compelled* to him; for indeed, *no man's judgement can be commanded by another man's will.*

But now, having given you some discoveries of a false Worship, I come to the proof of the second thing which I proposed, That it is not lawful to be present at such worship, (i.e.) when by your presence there you seem to own it, to approve of it, to assent or consent to it: You have a clear proof of it in 1 King. 19. 18. *Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees*  
*that*

that have not bowed unto Baal; and every man which hath not kissed him. They would not bow the knee to Baal, nor kiss him with the lip. This denying to bow the knee, and to kiss with the mouth, sheweth, that they did not only in heart abhor this false worship, but that they would not by any outward act so much as seem to own it, or countenance it; The meaning (in short) is, they did no way conform themselves to that corrupt service of the times. Another Scripture for this you have in 2 Chron. 11. the 15th & 14th verses compared. When Jeroboam had set up Calves there, and commanded all the people to worship them, in ver. 15. 'tis said, He ordained him Priests for the High-places; and for the Devils, and set the Calves which he had made. But now, in ver. 14. The Levites left their suburbs, and their possessions, and came to Judah and Jerusalem (for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the Priests Office unto the Lord:) and after them, out of all the Tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their Fathers. Mark that; such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel. Though the generality of the people went with Jeroboam to Dan and Bethel to sacrifice to the Calves, yet a remnant of Israel set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, who knew that God would be worshipped at Jerusalem: therefore they would not joyn with others, and

go with others; no, the Priests would lose their Lands and Livings, rather than they would own Jeroboams false gods, and worship them. You know what is commanded, in *Hos. 4. 15.* saith the Lord there, *Come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven;* What was this Gilgal and Beth-aven, that God commands them *not so much as to come thither?* O they were the principal places and seats where Jeroboam had set up his false worship: now God layes a Command on them that feared his Name, *not to come thither,* no, Not for curiosity-sake to please their fancies; they must not come there where that false worship was. So some would fain be present with them that worshipped false gods in the Temple, that yet did not approve of them; see how the chief Apostle reproves them for it, in *1 Cor. 10. 20.* *The Gentiles, they sacrifice to Devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have fellowship with Devils.* *Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of Devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and the table of Devils. Why do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?* So, again, in *2 Cor. 6. 14.* *Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath Righteousness with Unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what agreement hath the Temple of God with Idols? For ye are the Temple of the living God; wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean things, and*

*I will receive you.* — Mark how the Apostle do multiply expression upon expression? *Come out — Touch not.* — *Be ye separate,* and have nothing to do with them.

And I might shew you, how that by joynin with others in their false worship,

1. You sin against *yourselves*.

2. You sin against *others*.

3. You sin against *God*.

I say —

1. Joyn not with others in their false worship because hereby you sin against *yourselves*; for, by being parties in any false worship, (when) by owning of it, you come to be accessory to their sin. In Revel. 18. 4. *Come out of her my people be not partakers of her sins; that ye receive not of her plagues.* — *My People* — Why if God's own People will defile themselves with the Corruptions of *Babylon*, they must expect to partake of the Judgments of *Babylon*. And indeed, many times God is *more quick with his own People* in this respect than with others; because 'tis *their duty* to stand resolutely against all the Innovations and Corruptions in matters of Religion; therefore when they shall comply with the times, and defile themselves, many times: (I say) the Lord is quick in cutting them off, when he may suffer others to go on. And besides, hereby they throw themselves into the mouth of a temptation. God commands (you know) *Thou shalt not come near*



house of an Harlot, Prov. 5. 8. because of the temptation. Why, you know what's said concerning King *Abaz* (in 2 *King*. 16. 10.) that King unto *Damascus* to meet the King of *Affria* here, (out of a Complement it may be, to congratulate him, or the like) he saw an Altar that was at *Damascus*; and King *Abaz* sent to *Uriah* the Priest the fashion of the Altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof; and the Priest built an Altar, &c. He was presently in love with the Altar; to see it, as a temptation to him to make it, and to sacrifice on it, and worship in like manner. This *Uriah* (it seems) was one that was a *Temporizing Priest*, that would do any thing the King commanded him; therefore when once he had gotten the Altar made, and the King comes home, he presently falls to Idolatry: they lay on their Offering, then they eat it, and then they go to worshipping. *Peter* goes to see what the High-Priest hath done, he goes to warm himself, and is accused. It's dangerous to come into the High-Priests Hall, to warm at his fire, lest we go away with a scorched conscience. And again—

2. You sin against others too, that set up these superstitious wayes; whom you herein do abet, and encourage, and harden in their evil wayes. Do not communicate with them. Though you be not as *Master-builders* to draw out a Platform, yet you should have a care of bringing any brick or

mortar



*mortar to build Babel.* In short ; in practice you do offend others, and (it may be) by example draw them aside too : As in Gal. 2. 11. *Peter* (there) by his dissimulation, was a means to draw *Barnabas* and others of the Jews to side with him. And specially, such a one as is look'd on as *knowing* and a *religious* person, he is herein more dangerous than a *Pagan* or a *Papist* is ; you bathe them, and will not be led by their example. And again,

3. You sin herein against God too, by bringing him the *blinde*, the *halt*, and the *lame* : (For such is every way of Religion, every way of Worship that is of mans devising.) The Lord has not required any such service at your hands, and therefore you have no promise (and so no reason to expect) to be accepted in it. Nor can you do it in faith. As you must not believe for Doctrines the Commandments of men, neither are you to solemnize for Worship the Commandments of men. The People of God are bound to maintain the Integrity and Purity of God's Ordinances. Take heed of any thing that does but look like false Worship. VVe must abhor the garment that is but spotted with the flesh. VVe must not so much as touch the unclean thing. God forbade the Israelites to have a false god in their houses : though they did not worship it, yet they must not have it in their houses. And, in *Isa. 65. 4.* he reprehends them, not only for eating

the abominable thing, *Swines flesh*, but for having  
 he brook of that abominable thing in their vessels.

*Object. 1.* But, you will say, *Was not Elijah*  
*himself present at the Worship of Baal?* so we find,  
 1 King. 18. 26, &c. *Elijah, why he stands by*  
*them, and is a looker-on, and bids them cry aloud*  
*unto Baal: therefore (it seems) we may be present*  
*at false Worship, and yet not sin.*

*Answer.* Though *Elijah* was present, yet he did  
 not by his presence any way countenance or al-  
 low that worship of theirs, but he did reprove  
 them for it; he was present to convince them of  
 the evil of it, and to shew them the vanity of  
 their worship. And thus indeed the Prophets  
 and Apostles of God, they were sometimes pre-  
 sent at Sacrifices that were performed to Idols,  
 but it was on purpose to reprove them for it, and  
 to convince them of their Idolatry.

*Obj. 2.* But (you will say unto me) though we  
 be present at it, yet we can keep our minds to our  
 selves; we will not say Amen unto their prayers, we  
 will not joyn with them, but will keep our minds still  
 unto our selves.

*Answer.* That is but to dissemble, and to play  
 the Hypocrite both with God and men. To say  
 you will be present with your bodies at false wor-  
 ship, and yet absent in your spirits, it is in effect  
 to say, you will serve God with your souls, and  
 the Devil with your bodies. You know, the  
 worship that is done in an Assembly, 'tis look'd

on as the joynt action of the whole Assembly; to which you ought to say your *Amen*, if lawful; and if not, to shew your dislike of it. And therefore, if it be an Ordinance of God that thou beest present at, thou oughtst to come to it with thy whole heart and soul; and if otherwise, 'tis such, any act of which worship thou canst not warrantably joyn in, or be present at.

Obj. 3. *I but (you will say unto me) what if the Worship be corrupt in part, yet not in the whole; there may be many good prayers and good words in it; now, must we reject the good because of the bad that is mingled with it?*

I Answ. There are many good things in the *Turkish Alcoran*, as well as in the *Popish Masse-book*, yet may we not lawfully make use of either. The Israelites did halt betwixt God and Baal; that is, they did retain a great part of the true Worship of God, though they did joyn their own inventions with it: Now, 'tis not the retaining some part of the true Worship, that will sanctifie any part of the false Worship that is joyned with it; no, nor the true matter of worship that will sanctifie the false form of it. *A little leaven (here) will leaven the whole lump.* What though the *Philistines* did set up the *Ark* in the temple with *Dagon*; yet that neither honoured *Dagon* nor the Temple the more. What though there may be some tares among the corn; yet still both retain their own nature; this doth not make the tares

or *weeds* to become *Corn*. The Inventions and Devices of men in God's Worship, they are but unclean things, that nothing is able to wash, or to make clean. In *Ezek. 43. 8*. God does reprove them there for setting up their post by his post, and their threshold by his threshold. They did not pull down God's post or threshold, and set up their own in the room; but they set up their own by it. And in *Zeph. 1. 5*. They there would swear by the name of the Lord, and of *Malcam* too. So in *2 King. 17. 33*. There were some that would serve *Baal*, and yet fear the Lord. That is, they would not cast off all the Worship of God, but would retain some parts of it, onely they would joyn their own Inventions with it. Now, God hates to share his VVorship between Christ and Antichrist; that men should have in their right-hands many Truths of Christ, but in their left many falsities of Antichrist. Indeed, sometimes some part of God's VVorship covers a great deal of Superstition; There are many evils, much superstition used in the VVorship of God at this day, yet because they retain some principal Truths of the Gospel therewith, that's a great cover to all their corruptions. And indeed, the nearer you come to the true VVorship of God, and yet retain false worship with it, the more danger there is of swallowing up many people.

Obj. 4. *I but* (you will say unto me) *there may some things be found amiss in the prayers and preach-*  
ing

*ing of the best Ministers, that we cannot joyn in faith with. If we may not joyn with some good because there is some evil mingled with it, why in this case more than in that ?*

*I answer. That preaching and praying of Ministers, when they do exercise their own gifts, and have not Prayers and Sermons made for them, 'tis an Ordinance of God, and being an Ordinance of God, you may safely communicate therein, notwithstanding that there may be some failings in the Minister : in which case the rule is, To prove all things, and only to hold fast that which is good, 1 Thess. 5.25. I but, when any thing is brought into the worship of God that is not God's Ordinance, but mans, here you cannot communicate in it safely, because 'tis that that God has not required, nor promised any blessing unto ; and therefore you are to reject it, and not to have communion with it. Indeed, there are corruptions in the best hearts, and mixtures in the holiest duties : I but when the People of God do worship God in spirit and in truth, as long as they don't set up any Idols in their hearts, nor regard any iniquity in their souls, (as David says) so long the Lord doth not reject their services, though there are some personal infirmities that attend them.*

*Obj. 5. I but (you'l say) we hear worse things than these can be every day; as we go along the streets we hear men swearing and cursing; and though we are present, yet we hope we are never the worse for that.*

*I answer:* Though you hear such things in the streets, yet if you by no act of yours joyn with them in it, but do grieve in your spirits when you hear them, the sin is *theirs*, and not *yours*.

Obj. 6. *I but* (you'll say) *suppose it be such a way of Worship that (it may be) many holy and godly men use, and they have found good and comfort in it?*

*Ans.* We must follow the examples of holy men, no further than they follow the example and rules of Christ. 'Tis no sufficient argument to prove that such a thing is good, because some *holy men* have used it; then it might be an argument that taking of Concubines is good, because we reade of some good men in the old Testament that used it. *Asa* and *Jehosaphat* (I think) were good Kings; yet 'tis said, that in their dayes the *High-Places* were not taken down, and they are blamed for it. *Hezekiah* comes after, and he removes them, and is commended for what he did. I question not but when these good men went into these *High-Places*, though they did evil in what they did, yet the Lord might manifest himself good to them. Though some good men have used the Ordinances of God with some corruptions and mixtures, yet the Lord hath so far accepted of the integrity and uprightness of their hearts in what they did, as that they have found peace and comfort in so doing: I but this was the *mercy* of God to them. You must not think it enough to *justifie* any evil or corruption in worship, *that some good men have used it, and yet found*

comfort in the Ordinances: the times of their ignorance God might wink at, if they did but seek and serve him according to what they knew.

Obj. 7. *I but what if such a way of Worship be imposed on us, and commanded, then 'tis their faults that impose it, and not our faults that do it.*

*I answer:* That no man can without sin compose, or impose any forms or wayes of Worship of his own devising, for which he hath no ground in the Word of God; so neither can any submit to them without sin. VVhat is unlawful in him that imposeth, must needs be unlawful in him that doth receive it, and submit to it. The King in commanding *Daniel not to pray*, did not make *Daniels praying* ever the more unlawful: And the King's commanding the *three Children* and the rest to bow, did not commend the act, or make it ever the more lawful. 'Tis not mans allowing or commanding that doth make lawful any way of Worship that is not warranted by the Word of God. No man can lawfully do any thing in the Worship of God, but that which he is satisfied in his conscience he may do, whether commanded by man or not.

Obj. 8. *I but (you will say) the matter is not great, and we will yeeld but a little for peace and quietness sake.*

*I answer:* There is not a more dangerous and deceitful temptation than that in the world, for men to yeeld to the beginnings of evil under this pretence, that they will yeeld but in a little. He that



is not faithful in a *little*, will not be faithful in *much*. The Priest that yeelded to the King so far as to *make the Altar*, and *set it up*, afterwards must yield further, to *offer upon the Altar*, 2Kin. 16. the 11th, 15 & 16 verses compared. As, many good men, they have thought to yield *thus far*, and *thus far*, for peace and quietness sake: I but when once their feet have been in the snare, they have after swallowing some *gnats*, swallowed *Camels* too: and if the Serpent once get in his *head*, he will soon get in his *whole body*. 'Tis a dangerous thing to go after the inventions of *men*, though in never so little, (the Rule is certain;) because they know not how far they shall go. As a Nobleman of *England* once said, *I will pin my faith on no mans sleeve, because I know not whither they will carry it*. The true Religion hath the *Word of God* for its Rule, which remains certain and unalterable; so that when I guide my self by that, I know how far I must go, and where to stop; but when I make the *Traditions and Inventions of men* my Rule, here is no certain stop at all; for men may be multiplying their Traditions and Inventions every day. Therefore 'tis dangerous to yield in *little things* in matter of false Worship.

Obj. 9. *I but (you may say) it's possible hereby we may deprive our selves of many of the Ordinances of God, and so deprive our souls of comfort, and we had better do it.*

Ans. 1. Let me ask you, What comfort and

benefit can you expect from the Ordinances of God, if you may not enjoy them *as appointed* by the Lord? If you cannot enjoy God's Ordinances without committing sin, 'tis your duty to forbear them; for this is the Rule, *You may not do evil for the enjoyment of good*, Rom. 3. 8. And therefore, 'tis not simply the *want of Ordinances* that is your sin, but your *contempt of them*. I but now, when you can't enjoy them in the way and after the manner enjoined of the Lord, and forbear them upon that account, this is no *contempt*, therefore not your sin. But further,

*Ans. 2.* Blessed be the Father of mercies, there is yet a possibility of enjoying the Ordinances of God according to his own appointment; Though we may not have them so publickly as we could desire, yet we may have them elsewhere, and 'tis our duty (as you have heard made good to you) to follow Gospel-Administrations to what-ever place they are confined, and in what-ever place they may be enjoyed; if they are driven into corners, we must follow them into those corners.

But now, here I meet with another Objection, and it has respect

1. To our *absenting* our selves from the *Publick Assemblies*. And——
2. To our betaking of our selves to the more *Private-Meetings* of God's People.

And both of them have their rise from the Laws made in that behalf.

x. Respecting our absenting our selves from the Publick Assemblies.

*Object.* You will say unto me, 'Tis possible, if we do not yeeld, we may suffer; we may be undone both *We* and our Families too.

*Ans.* All I will say to that, is this; When you may not obey the Commands of men, without sinning against God, you had better suffer than sin: you had better suffer from men, because you are afraid of offending God; than to suffer from God, because you are afraid of offending men. This indeed is a great temptation to many a good soule, and holy man, O what will become of my Wife and Children? if I lose my Living, my means of Livelihood, they may starve, and my Conscience is against that: I have peace neither day nor night. Why it was the case of those we spake of but now, (in 1 King. 19. 18.) they ventured Lives and Estates and All, rather than they would bow the knee to Baal: I but yet God was a Sanctuary to them, he provided an Obadiab that fed them, 1 King. 18. 4. And when Elijah was forc'd to flee for his life from the Prophets of Baal, God commanded an Angel one time, and a Raven another time to feed him, 1 King. 19. 17. & 1 King. 14. 4, 6. If ordinary means fail, God knows how to raise up extraordinary means, and will do so in time of his Peoples distress. Mind that place in Isa. 66. 5. Hear the Word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his Word; your Brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my Name sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified.

from *fed; but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be*  
*ashamed. Mark, my Brethren: There are a company*  
*among you that do tremble at my Word, (q. d.) that*  
*dare not do any thing in my Worship without*  
*my Word; but there are others of your Bre-*  
*thren that will find out wayes to avoid sufferings;*  
*and will adventure upon things in my Worship*  
*that I never commanded them; and they hate*  
*you, and cast you out, excommunicate you, because*  
*you are not of their judgment, because your con-*  
*sciences are more tender than theirs: I but he*  
*shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed:*  
*though for the present you may lie under con-*  
*tempt, and be reproached as factious persons,*  
*and they may flatter it out, and have preferments*  
*from the world, yet in time to come, the Lord*  
*will appear to your joy, and their shame. And cer-*  
*tainly, Brethren, the time is a coming, and not*  
*far off, when the Lord will appear for his Wor-*  
*ship, & for his Ordinances in the purity of them;*  
*and when he will cast shame and contempt upon*  
*all false worship and worshippers. Let me start*  
*up this, with a story concerning a Christian Soul-*  
*dier, who being in the Heathen Army, and it be-*  
*ing a day whereon the Heathen Souldiers did al-*  
*wayes use to wear a Vail upon their heads, in*  
*honour to some Idol god; the Christian Souldi-*  
*er in stead of wearing his Vail on his head, he*  
*carried it in his hand: whereupon his fellow-*  
*Souldiers did begin to scoff at him, and a great*  
*mutiny there was presently in the Army, and he*  
 brought

brought before the Officers to answer for his facts; and his answer was, *I am a Christian, I dare not conform to them in their superstitious observation of dayes.* At which they were exceedingly enraged, and so, that not only he, but other Christians were like to suffer by his means: so that many other Christians were hugely offended with this Christian, that he would stand upon such a small thing. Now, *Tertullian* commends him, as being one that was holier than any of the rest; who for fear of Persecution would comply and yeeld to their superstitious observations. And though the other Christians said, *Where are we [forbidden] to wear a Vail on our heads?* He answered, *But where are we [commanded] to do any such thing?* So, some indeed may comply, and yeeld to superstitious observations; yet those that are of a true Christian Spirit will not comply, whatever persecutions or sufferings may fall upon them for it. As in that fore-quoted place, 1 King. 19. 8. *I have left me seven thousand in Israel, that have not (no, nor never will, come what will) bowed the knee to Baal, nor kissed him with their lips.* But now,

2. The other part of the Objection respects our betaking of our selves to the more *Private-Meetings* of Gods People; and it is this: There are Laws made against them, and we shall run our selves into danger if we be taken in these *Conventicles.* To this I answer:

1. If you will be afraid of danger, then never think of performing duty: if you will still be afraid of

of danger, you will be sure to keep your selves as much as you can out on't, what-ever duty you neglect for it : if you will be afraid of danger, little hope then that you will ever either *do*, or *be good* at all ; seeing that *if any man [will] live godly in Christ Jesus, he [must] suffer persecution.* The fearful did never yet set up any Trophies of Victory.

2. Had the Saints in former Ages and Times been afraid of danger, they had never left us such examples as they have done. They would do their duty, and trust God with their safety, let what-ever would come on them.

3. Let me tell you, 'tis a very shameful and a very sinful thing, to shun services and duties, because we would avoid sufferings and dangers. You must have a care you don't suffer as evil-doers, but never fear suffering as well-doers. In 1 Pet. 4. 15, 16. *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other mens matters ; yet, if any man [suffer as a Christian] let him not be ashamed, but let him glorifie God in this behalf.*

And thus I have done with the second Inference. Again——

3. It doth inform us what to think of these Conventicles, of these meetings together of God's People. You should think of them as things of consequence, as things of concernment, as things of soul and salvation-concernment, as things that we ought and are bound as much to come to, as to any other duty whatsoever.

Now there are six or seven things *this way* that I would lay before you.

1. Look on them in *God's Dictionary*, and find how you read them *there*: There they are call'd the *Communion of Saints*; the *Paradise of the Earth*; the *Harbingers of Heaven*; the *First-fruits of Canaan*; the *Earnest of Eternal Joy*, and this is *all*.

2. Look upon them as the only Worship that God had in the pure and primitive times, in the beginning of the Gospel-dayes, when no place in publick was admitted them, or allowed to them.

3. Look on *Conventicles* as all the means of comfort that you your selves are like to have in times of persecution and *fiery tryal*. When *Ministers* are driven into *corners*, follow them into those *corners*.

4. Look upon them as the great Hammer, to break and beat down Antichrist's Kingdom.

5. Look upon them as Evidences of your Grace, of the *truth* of your Grace, and of the *strength* of your Grace, that you are neither *afraid* to confess Christ, nor yet *ashamed* to confess him.

6. Look upon them as a great help of your Faith, to encrease it, to strengthen it; to get and procure joy and comfort.

7. Look on them, as things very highly pleasing unto God: as you may see in the Text; — *The Lord hearkened and heard*; even as a man that hears some curious Musick, he gives his  
mind



mind with all intention to the same. — *O let me hear thy voice ; for thy voice is sweet, Cant. 2, 14.* 'tis spoken of the Church in her Meetings. When they came together, O how delightful it was to God ! But——

Secondly. The next Use shall be of *Lamentation*. Is it thus, that there ought to be such *Meetings*, and for such *ends* as you have heard, among which (I told you) this was one, *To humble and afflict our souls ?* then let us put it into execution this day. Give me leave to strike this nail to the *head*, yea, to the *heart*, that it may be a day of *great lamentation*, and of *great mourning*, that we may every one pour out our souls before the Lord. (Beloved, this is very necessary.) And——

First, Begin with *your own souls*, search them to the very bottom ; labour to find out your *sins*, and endeavour to bring your hearts to a *godly sorrow and repentance for them*, such a one as may be *unto life*. O that as your sins have been as *clouds* over your *heads*, so now they may break down into your *hearts* by a shower of godly sorrow ! Consider seriously how highly and heavily God is provoked against you. Methinks that very one thing, *That God is become our Enemy, hides his face from us, stops his ears against us, and turns his back upon us*, were enough to kill any *gracious heart*, and to strike him dead at his soul.

Look but upon what your sin *has* provoked God to do, and upon what it *may* provoke God to do, and I hope that will humble you at this day, for

eat your peace, and the things thereof should be hid from your eyes.

First. What it *has* provoked God to do, viz. to rid you of your choicest mercies, your precious opportunities, to strip you stark naked of all your glorious priviledges; except now and then a bit in a corner, we can else get no pure bread, but a *stone in stead of bread, and a Viper in stead of Fish.* Sayes David, *My tears are my meat and drink day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?* Psal. 42. 3. The loss of God's presence may well humble us, and cause us to *water our couch with our tears.* And then,

Another thing that may make us humble is this; God has spit in our faces. O this should go to our hearts. If a Father spit in his Daughters face for her Adultery and Uncleanness, will she not be ashamed? yea, and grieve too? Now, shall God spit in his Peoples face, and we not be ashamed, and grieved? Why, 'tis so, that God *has* spit in our faces. For,

1. God has (in a large degree) given us over to the power and lust of our enemies. There is not a greater cut to God's People, than to be in their enemies hand, or in their enemies Land. -- *He delivered his glory over into the enemies hand, because they had provoked him,* Psal. 78. 58, 61. Why truly, the *Philistines* have gotten us into their hands, and whether they will put out our eyes, or take away our lives we cannot tell.

2. Not only so; but we have provoked God

so to spit in our faces, as that we stink in the nostrils of our enemies, so that they scorn and deride us, because we have sinned against the Lord. *Jacob's* complaint was of *Simeon* and *Levi*, — *You have made me to stink among the inhabitants of the Land*, Gen. 34. 30. Truly, so have our sins made us to stink in the nostrils of all our enemies round about us. This it has provoked God to do. But now,

Secondly, Consider what your sins may provoke God to do. If so be you don't lament, return, reform, you will provoke God to proceed yet further against you. Brethren, there are sad things, rods laid in brine for you, if you don't lay your souls in brine: There are Fines, Prisons, — carrying of you into strange Lands, &c. In *Lev.* 26. ver. 27 to 33. there God tells them plainly, because they would not be instructed nor reformed by those punishments that he had brought upon them, therefore he would send them into their enemies Land; he would make the Nation to cast them out, so that they should have no more sanctuary in that place. Again,

Thirdly. Let me tell you (by way of comfort) if you will repent, lament, reform, and return, there is hope in *Israel* concerning this thing: Oh there is mercy with God, that he might be feared. With God there is pity, pardon, peace; and God is ready to bestow it, yea, more ready than we are to receive it. But —

Secondly. As we should mourn over our sins, so we should lament over the sins of the

people of the Land among whom we live; we should weep for them that laugh at us, and mourn for them that mourn not for themselves.

And know, there are (1.) the sins of the *Priests*, and (2) the sins of the *People*. Now take either of these :—

First, The sins of the *Priests*. *Jer. 23. 15.* For from the [*Priests*] *prophaneness* is gone out into the Land. Truly, so we may say; God's House that was a House of Prayer, is [now] become a Den of Thieves and Robbers. The Wine of the Sanctuary is now become the *Venom* of the Sanctuary.

And I might divide them over again, into the *Fathers of the Church*, and the *Sons of the Church*; (as they call themselves:) they have their great and grievous sins of both sorts :—

First. The *Fathers*: Look upon their *Pride* and *Prelacy*, their setting up of *will-worship*, their lording it over *Christ's people*, their persecuting of *God's People* for *Conscience-sake*, &c. And,

Secondly. The *Sons of the Church*; their *Apostacy* and *Atheism*.

1. Their *Apostacy*. Divers that were among us once, their compliance with them that hate the Lord; and putting stumbling-blocks before the weak; and their horrible *subscription*, whereby they do interpretatively deny the Faith it self.

2. Their *Atheism*: their base Ignorance, their gross Drunkennells & Covetousness, their slavishness of him they call their *Diocessan*, being more than a Bishop's Canon, than

*Gods Commandment; and then preferring the Book of Common Prayer above the Bible. O that we could take these things seriously and sadly to heart, even the wickedness of the Clergie! O the sins of the Clergie are very great and grievous! And then,*

*Secondly. For the People. (And 'tis very like, if the Priests be bad, the people will be worse; and if the sons of the Church will be the sons of Belial, the people will be apt to learn any wickedness that they shall teach them, either by their principles, or by their practices.) O the Blasphemy, the hatred of Holiness, Swearing, Cursing, drinking of Healths, yea, even in their own blood; yea, many drinking Healths to the Devil himself! We read in Act. 14. 11. that the people there cryed out concerning Paul and Barnabas, that the Gods were come down from heaven to them in the likeness of men: but if they were now in England, they would surely say that the Devils were come up into the Land among us.*

*Let us therefore (my Brethren) now do our duties, carry our selves as friends to them, though they carry themselves as enemies to us. Let us be the Noah's, the David's, the Jeremiah's, the Paul's, whose eyes were Rivers of waters, and did run down night and day, because men did break the Law of God. I have told you often, and now tell you weeping, that they are enemies to the Cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things. O let us pray for their souls, their conviction and conversion. Brethren, though you have been praying long already, and see but little account of your prayers, yet follow it on still, you do not know but that the hearts of your enemies may be given in unto you: O pray that they may be reformed, and that they may return, and may set up the Lord Jesus Christ, whom they have dethroned.*

*And then, my Brethren, if so be that your prayers (you see) can't prevail for them, then (there is another duty remains for you to do, (The first must be done first; but afterwards) pray that the strong*

...and draw out of the Law...  
...to give you many places of Scripture to  
...this Truth, seeing it is so very plain from that  
...chapter of Nehemiah, the 4th and 5th verses,  
...when the enemies of God set themselves against  
...the building of the Temple of the Lord, Nehemiah prays  
...the Lord that he would preserve them, but over-  
...their enemies. And truly, my Brethren, though  
...of this at our duty, yet I could make much  
...with, that God would hear our prayers for  
...their destruction.

...I might have added a third Use, and that is  
...and persuade you all, that whenever there  
...any such opportunity of private meeting together, ne-  
...to be discouraged from it, because you shall be dis-  
...or may come other ways to suffer by it. No,  
...your Glory, is your Crown, in such times as these  
...that you dare so bravely and boldly acknowledge  
...the Lord Jesus Christ, against so many opposers and  
...of Him, that are in the times and places where  
...you live. But I suppose it would be needless to urge  
...any further: you see 'tis a duty, and the very Rea-  
...that I have given you) of the Polar, will be  
...sufficient. Therefore I shall leave this with  
...and, both I and you with God, desiring of the  
...to add his blessing to what has been spoken  
...it may be of good use to you.



